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Thesis

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON
AS EXPRESSED IN HIS POETRY

by

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(A.B., Radcliffe, 1908)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

1934

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1917-18-1918-1919

1918-1919-1920

1917

1920-1921-1922-1923-1924-1925-1926-1927

1928-1929-1930-1931-1932-1933-1934-1935

1936-1937

1938-1939-1940-1941-1942-1943-1944-1945

1946-1947-1948-1949-1950-1951-1952-1953

1954-1955-1956-1957-1958-1959-1960-1961

1962

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON
AS EXPRESSED IN HIS POETRY

"The state of American poetry during the closing years of the last century," writes Ben Ray Redman in his EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON, "was neither satisfactory, exciting, nor ¹ promising." He quotes from Carl and Mark Van Doren, "There were, indeed, numerous writers of verse who had some reputation, but the public was right in feeling that these were minor poets, earnest or dainty survivors from more energetic days. No one of them had been shaped by the great national struggles of the past century and no one of them gave voice to the newer national ideals which were demanding expression. For the most part, they were content to sing pretty songs about remote emotions or to argue in meter about established ² ideas." Robinson himself alludes to the work of these poets as "songs without souls," and cries:

"Shall not there one arise
To wrench one banner from the western skies,
And mark it with his name forevermore?"⁴

He himself seems to be the answer to his own question. He has lived and written in a century marked not only by a national, but by an international, upheaval. His work, far from being "songs without souls," bears the impress of his ⁴ time. His "reading of life and character," moreover, is of such virility and universality that, according to Charles Cestre, it is destined to last for ages.

1. Page 26. 3. E. A. Robinson: Collected Poems, PAGE 93

2. Ibid, Page 27. 4. Cestre: Introduction to

Edwin Arlington Robinson,
Page 6

Though nearly forty years have elapsed between the publication of his first work in 1896 and that of his last in 1933, the strands of thought apparent in the earliest poems are manifest in all that follow. Of that first little volume, THE TORRENT AND THE NIGHT BEFORE, The Bookman for February, 1897 makes mention as follows: "There is true fire in his verse, and there are the swing and the singing of wind and wave and the passion of human emotion in his lines; but his limitations are vital. His humor is of a grim sort, and the world is not beautiful to him, but a prison-house. In the night-time there is weeping and sorrow, and joy does not come in the morning."¹ Robinson's reply is editorially recorded in The Bookman for March, 1897:

"Mr. E. A. Robinson writes thanking us for the 'unexpected notice' of his book of poems called THE TORRENT AND THE NIGHT BEFORE in these columns in the February Bookman. Mr. Robinson adds: 'I am sorry to learn that I have painted myself in such lugubrious colors. The world is not a "prison-house," but a kind of spiritual kindergarten, where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks.'"²

"What is the meaning of life? Or is life worth the living?" are the questions, according to Redman, asked again and again in Robinson's poetry. "Individual case after individual case he examines with sympathetic patience; constantly he searches his own soul and cons the faith of

1. Ben Ray Redman: Edwin Arlington Robinson: page 32
 2. Ibid., page 33

3. Ibid., page 34

all men for an answer, but judgment at the last must be withheld. And so he cannot reply to that lesser question which is but part of the greater one: What is success and what is failure? The apparent 'failures' of the world obsess him, but constantly he repeats that he can pass no judgment. With his spiritual kindergarten he will not presume to spell God or any of God's patterns. But with the eternal patience of the philosopher he must constantly arrange and rearrange these blocks according to the inspiration of the artist."¹

Again: "The conflict in the poet's mind is crystal clear, and its mechanism quite familiar. The clash arises from the measureless discrepancy between life experienced and life desired; the forces involved are chilling reason and warming faith, each impotent to conquer wholly, each incapable of complete surrender."²

THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT, published in 1897, contains the poems which appeared in the earlier volume as well as some others. In the very title poem there is sufficient to refute the idea that Robinson looks upon life as a prison-house. Some of us, he admits, may be but Children of the Night, living only in darkness.

"For those that never know the light
The darkness is a sullen thing,
And they, the Children of the Night,
Seem lost in Fortune's winnowing."³

Life holds little promise for such.

1. Ben Ray Redman: Edwin Arlington Robinson, page 34
2. Ibid., page 17
3. The Children of the Night, page 11

" 'T were better ere the sun go down,
Upon the first day we embark
In life's imbibed sea to drown
Than sail forever in the dark." 1

Yet we need not remain in this darkness.

"Let us, the Children of the Night,
Put off the cloak that hides the scar,
Let us be Children of the Light
And tell the ages what we are." 2

In CREDO the idea of the Light is thus repeated:

"I cannot find my way; there is no star
In all the shrouded heavens anywhere;
And there is not a whisper in the air
Of any living voice but one so far
That I can hear it only as a bar
Of lost, imperial music, played when fair
And angel fingers wove, and unaware,
Dead leaves to garlands where no roses are.
No, there is not a glimmer, nor a call,
For one who welcomes, welcomes when he fears,
The black and awful chaos of the night;
For through it all--above, beyond it all--
I know the far-sent message of the years,
I feel the coming glory of the Light!" 3

In THE ALTAR the bewilderment resulting from the surrounding night is blended with the same faith in the Light.

"Alone, remote, not witting where I went,
I found an altar builded in a dream--
A fiery place, whereof there was a gleam
So swift, so searching, and so eloquent
Of upward promise, that love's murmur, blent
With sorrow's warning, gave but a supreme
Unending impulse to that human stream
Whose flood was all for the flame's fury bent.

"Alas! I said--the world is in the wrong.
But the same quenchless fever of unrest
That thrilled the foremost of that martyred throng
Thrilled me, and I awoke--and was the same
Bewildered insect plunging for the flame
That burns, and must burn somehow for the best." 4

The idea of the Light, which is the guide of life, is

1. The Children of the Night, page 11 3. Collected

2. Ibid, page 12

4. Collected Poems, Poems, page 94
page 92

variously interpreted in other poems. Sometimes it would seem to be self-reliance and individualism, as in THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT:

"So let us in ourselves revere
The Self which is the Universe"; 1

and in OCTAVE XVII:

"To you that sit with Sorrow like chained slaves,
And wonder if the night will never come,
I would say this! The night will never come,
And sorrow is not always. But my words
Are not enough; your eyes are not enough;
The soul itself must insulate the Real;
Or ever you do cherish in this life--
In this life or any life--repose." 2

In the following it is faith in God:

"When we can all so excellently give
The meaning of love's wisdom with a blow--
Why can we not in turn receive it so,
And end this murmur for the life we live?
And when we do so frantically strive
To win strange faith, why do we shun to know
That in love's elemental over-glow
God's wholesomeness gleams with light superlative?

"Oh, brother men, if you have eyes at all,
Look at a branch, a bird, a child, a rose--
Or anything God ever made that grows--
Nor let the smallest vision of it slip,
Till you can read, as on Belshazzar's wall,
The glory of eternal partnership." 3

In THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT and in OCTAVE XXII God is described as a God of justice and of love:

"And if God be God, He is just;
.....
And if God be God, He is love." 4

"Forebodings are the fiends of Recreance.
The master of the moment, the clear seer
Of ages, too securely scans what is
Ever to be appalled at what is not;

1. The Children of the Night, page 12
2. Collected Poems, page 105
3. Collected Poems, page 96
4. Children of the Night, page 12

blow ti semitens
annoc radio ni heterogenit vianotryv
HET ni en matiabivibrit has consider-ries ad et mese
:THOIN HT TO MARIJIN

stev-t eviesero ni en t I o8
I : "stevius ent et holiw tie8 dT

:IENX SVATOO ni has
sevile bhatado nli nottoE nli die sedis nov oT
enew teven llii tdiu edt ti rebrow bni
enew teven llii tdiu edt laid yea hifow I
abrow yet tdiu ayewis ton et wotice has
;dywot ton ote avev nov ;dywot ton tli
;Lest edt etaluan remi tlesti lros oT
--stil sif ni deimdo ob nov revo tO
S " seout--stil yea to stli sif ni

:bod ni stli si ti gaiwollet edt ni
vi vifasifoxe on llii nso ew nemi
--wold a dliw mohatw a'rtol lo galmen dT
on ti visor nif ni ton et nso yli
fevli on stli sif ton tliw sif has bni
ovita vifolliatt os on et nemi bni
word et nudi et b yliw dlist esquats nif oT
wolp-revo istaenle elevol ni tadt
tertisfrequa nif lliw essey esenmosebudo a'beo

,lii ja esy evad nov li ,nem rediord oT
--esot a ,blido a ,briid a ,domerd a ,te bilo
--stoyt dadt obse revo ho galpysa ro
lili ja visev teflana edt tel tli
,liw a'vrasadaf no ea ,baci nso nov llii
S " ,idat uttag lantide lo vyo dT

coo IENX SVATOO ni has thair wh to n'AGGIO HT ni
:vel lo bni scijent lo coo a coo a es bedriob si
;tau si esH ,coo ed coo si bni
S " ,vel si esH ,coo ed coo si bni

coosetos to abneit edt ate agnibodetos
keeb ts-fo edt ,dmacm edt lo tetam edt
ai tsaw anus vlatwaa coo ,segs to
;ton et tsaw te bellwaa edt et tsaw

SI eses ,ut lo n'AGGIO edt ,t
Goli-berg hoem ,baes 108 S
88 aps ,esens berolli G
SI eses ,tdgi ,ut lo merbli G

He sees beyond the groaning borough lines
 Of Hell, God's highways, gleaming, and he knows
 That Love's complete communion is the end
 Of anguish to the liberated man." 1

Again, the Light is identified with Wisdom:

"Here by the windy docks I stand alone,
 But yet companioned. There the vessel goes,
 And there my friend goes with it, but the wake
 That mills and ebbs between that friend and me
 Love's earnest is of Life's all-purposeful
 And all-triumphant sailing, when the ships
 Of wisdom loose their fretful chains and swing
 Forever from the crumbled wharves of Time." 2

It is also identified with Thought:

"There is one battle-field whereon we fall
 Triumphant and unconquered, but alas!
 We are too fleshly fearful of ourselves
 To fight there till our days are whirled and blurred
 By sorrow, and the ministering wheels
 Of anguish take us eastward, where the clouds
 Of human gloom are lost against the gleam
 That shines of Thought's impenetrable mail"; 3

with Knowledge:

"When we shall hear no more the cradle-songs
 Of ages--when the timeless hymns of Love
 Defeat them and outsound them--we shall know
 The rapture of the large release which all
 Right science comprehends, and we shall read,
 With unoppressed and unoffended eyes,
 That record of All-Soul whereon God writes
 In everlasting runes the truth of Him"; 4

and with Truth:

"Like a white wall whereon forever breaks
 Unsatisfied the tumult of green seas,
 Man's unconjectured godliness rebukes
 With its imperial silence the lost waves
 Of insufficient grief. This mortal surge
 That bears against us now is nothing else
 Than plangent ignorance. Truth neither shakes
 Nor wavers, but the world shakes, and we shriek." 5

These themes of Thought, Wisdom, and Truth recur in

1. Collected Poems, page 105
2. Ibid., page 107
3. Ibid., page 102

4. Ibid., page 102
5. Ibid., page 106

esnli dgnorod galnory mit knysc ova eH
eword ad hns gntmssig aywngid a'hdg illi 10
bus off at molunmoo -salqoo a'evol jadT
I " lnn bedstedi mit et deimna 10

tnobalN ntw beitthnbi at tnyd edt ,lins

uncis busie I snoch yank edt yd nish
aecd lasswad edt ,benolissqeo t y rns
lss edt rns ,et gtrc asog bneit ya eroff oca
a bus ouerl tnd gnowed addo bratallim jadT
int ecocing-lis t'nd to si deimna a'evol
scdne edt rde ,gallha tndqutrt-lis bka
purs bus unido Intert rnt snoch lobain 10
S" mit to a'vish heldario mit moh neverol

tdngodT ntw beitthnbi oais si tl

list o' nosodw bl-rt-edt sno'at ejent
lissis rns ,caterpocur bus tndqutrt
servicino lo Intert videsT oca bus nE
bervulc bus ntridw oca yns mro lliit ejent tndt ot
sleeww pnt-tainim edt bus ,notic yH
aboco edt eroda ,brawes an snt deimna 10
mrdi ,edt jat-ge tsol oca modig nardt
C ;"lisa edstxanacm a'ndqutrt lo sonida rns

tegbelwomk dtiv

agoo-ibstc edt etom on tnen llsda ew n dH
evol to amoy basemt edt nndw--saga 10
wom llsda ew--ndt bnowtuo bus want testeo
lts nndw bas-let ejtaI edt lo sntcer edt
bas llsda ew has ,abnaderquido sonelos tndt
,seve behnction oca heantrquido dtiv
setlirw hoi nootm lns-lis to brocer jadT
l ;"mH-ko dntc edt sntc pntseptre nI

tdtvtl dtiv ,bus

esnli tevetol nosidw llsd w tndt
,nca lntg to tliut edt beitthnbi
anndar snttibog bnttq;gocm e'nm
seavw tsol edt sonelis lslsqul ati dnt
egym lntom tndt ,leira tndqutrt 10
sntc galidom si woc an tndt sntc jadT
anndar teatim tndt ,monstongt tndqutrt edt
C ,lnttis ew bus ,nccida hlow -it rns ,stevs to

et nntc dntt bus ,nchisw ,tdngodT lo sntc sntc

SOI sngq ,hdI ,A SOI sngq ,deI ,C SOI sngq ,hdI ,C
SOI sngq ,hdI ,B SOI sngq ,deI ,B SOI sngq ,hdI ,C

THE GARDEN and in the octaves beginning, "There is no loneliness--no matter where," and "The guerdon of new childhood is repose." In one poem only do we find a note of sheer pessimism:

"Still through the dusk of dead, black-legended,
And unremunerative years we search
To get where life begins, and still we groan
Because we do not find the living spark
Where no spark ever was; and thus we die,
Still searching, like poor old astronomers
Who totter off to bed and go to sleep,
To dream of untriangulated stars." 1

This is counteracted in the notable octave which implies that the less cause we have for faith in anything that is of the earth, the more we may trust the Light above and beyond earth.

"When one that you and I had all but sworn
To be the purest thing God ever made
Bewilders us until at last it seems
An angel has come back restigmatized--
Faith wavers, and we wonder what there is
On earth to make us faithful any more,
But never are quite wise enough to know
The wisdom there is in that wonderment." 2

We cannot now understand, but let us have courage to believe that some day we surely shall. This thought is elaborated in KOSMOS:

"Think of it, all ye millions that have planned,
And only planned, all ye builders on the sand,
Whose works are down!--Is love so small, forsooth?
Be brave! Tomorrow you will understand
The doubt, the pain, the triumph, and the Truth." 3

For though we grope now among our perplexities, we shall by them be strengthened for something better. This idea is developed in the following poem:

1. Collected Poems, page 103

2. Ibid., page 103

3. Children of the Night, page

"Not by the grief that stuns and overwhelms
 All outward recognition of revealed
 And righteous omnipresence are the days
 Of most of us affrighted and diseased,
 But rather by the common snarls of life
 That come to test us and to strengthen us
 In this prentice-age of discontent,
 Rebelliousness, faint-heartedness, and shame." 1

Thus in his first publication Robinson has revealed his belief in the power of an inner Light, identified variously with Self, Faith in God, Wisdom, Knowledge, Thought, and Truth. Furthermore, he has sounded the note of courage which is the concomitant of faith in the Light.

In this volume, too, occur a few of the character studies which Robinson is constantly making in his effort to discover the effect which the presence or absence of the Light in men has on their lives. From the every-day walks of life he examines John Evereldown,² who follows "the women wherever they call"; Luke Havergal,³ who contemplates suicide to join his lost love"; Richard Cory,⁴ who "fluttered pulses when he said 'Good morning,' and "glittered when he walked," yet

"Went home and put a bullet through his head";
 and Aaron Stark,⁵ the miser,

"Cursed and unkempt, shrewd, shrivelled and morose."
 All these are examples of men not guided by any Light.

Robinson turns also to the pages of history. He extols Zola,⁶ because he dared to see "the human heart of God"; Verlaine,⁷ because the "good in him is living after the evil is dead"; George Crabbe,⁸ because he had the "sure strength that fearless truth endows"; and Thomas Hood,⁹ who cloaked

1. Children of the Night, page 36
 2. Collected Poems, page 73
 3. Ibid., page 74
 4. Ibid., page 82

5. Ibid., page 86
 6. Ibid., page 85
 7. Ibid., page 96
 8. Ibid., page 94

9. Ibid., page 91

the anguish of his life with pleasantries. In all of these Robinson finds the Light burning.

In CALVARY we have the first of those historical portraits which show the wide gulf which separates the great leader who walks fearlessly in the illumination of his own great Light and the world, ever eager to belittle or crucify him.

"Friendless and faint, with martyred steps and slow
Faint for the flesh, but for the spirit free
Stung by the mob that came to see the show,
The Master toiled along to Calvary;
We gibed him, as he went, with houndish glee,
Till his dimmed eyes for us did overflow;
We cursed his vengeless hands thrice wretchedly,--
And this was nineteen hundred years ago.

"But after nineteen hundred years the shame
Still clings, and we have not made good the loss
That outraged faith has entered in his name.
Ah, when shall come love's courage to be strong!
Tell me, O Lord--tell me, O Lord, how long
Are we to keep Christ writhing on the cross!"¹

The title poem, CAPTAIN CRAIG, of Robinson's second volume, published in 1903, continues the study of humanity. The subject, Captain Craig, is an outcast of fortune, in whom, however, the divine spark burns bright.

"I doubt if ten men in all Tilbury Town
Had ever shaken hands with Captain Craig,
Or called him by his name, or looked at him
So curiously, or so concernedly,
As they had looked at ashes; but a few--
Say five or six of us--had found somehow
The spark in him, and we had fanned it there,
Choked under, like a jest in Holy Writ,
By Tilbury prudence."² 2

Conventional religion was letting the Captain starve.

1. Collected Poems, page 83
2. Ibid., page 113

"There were no men to blame.
 There was just a false note in the Tilbury tune,
 A note that able-bodied men might sound
 Hosannas on while Captain Craig lay quiet.
 They might have made him sing by feeding him
 Till he should march again, but probably
 Such yielding would have jeopardized the rhythm.
 They found it more melodious to shout
 Right on, with unmolested adoration,
 To keep the tune as it had always been,
 To trust in God and let the Captain starve." 1

Captain Craig says that at his death men will have no more to say of him than that he was a humorist. Such a judgment to him is no disgrace, because he considers humor an attribute of the divine. "God's humor," he says, "is the music of the spheres," and those who quiver and clutch "for something larger, something unfulfilled, some wiser kind of joy," will never have it until they "learn to laugh with God."

Robinson implies that Captain Craig's humor is akin to God's. How, then, shall we define this humor? It seems to be, first, a fine sense of proportion, which enables men to distinguish what is base and worthless in life from what is divine. Secondly, it seems to be a spontaneous delight, like a child's, in the sunshine of life--a delight which can persist through the shadows. Says the young narrator of Captain Craig's story:

"I felt at length as one who throws himself
 Down restless on a couch when clouds are dark,
 And shuts his eyes to find when he wakes up
 And opens them again what seems at first
 An unfamiliar sunlight in his room
 And in his life--as if the child in him
 Had laughed and let him see, and then I knew
 Some prowling superfluity of child
 In me had found the child in Captain Craig

And let the sunlight reach him." 1

Later he speaks of "the child that is the man, the Mystery, the Phoenix of the World." Captain Craig writes to his young friend to think of him

"as one who vegetates
 In tune with all the children who laugh best
 And longest through the sunshine, though far off
 Their laughter and unheard, for 'tis the child,
 O friend, that with his laugh redeems the man.
 Time steals the infant, but the child he leaves,
 And we.....
 Were brutes without him." 2

Again the Captain says:

"And the child--
 The child that is the saviour of all ages
 The prophet and the poet, the crown-bearer
 Must yet with Love's unhonored fortitude,
 Survive to cherish and attain for us
 The candor and the generosity
 By leave of which we smile if we bring back
 The first revealing flash that wakened us
 When Wisdom like a flash of dungeon-light
 Came searching down to find us." 3

While Captain Craig exalts the child in man, he warns us against the "child in excess." As an illustration of what he means he tells of the woman who

"goes
 Like a whirlwind through an orchard in the springtime--
 Throwing herself away as if she thought
 The world and the whole planetary circus
 Were a flourish of apple blossoms." 4

She is a woman

"cursed with happiness:
 Beauty, and wealth, health, horses--everything
 That she could ask, or we could ask is hers,
 Except an inward eye for the dim fact
 Of what this dark world is." 5

She

1. Collected Poems, page 122
2. Ibid., page 125
3. Ibid., page 132

4. Ibid., page 128
5. Ibid., page 127

"Giggles and eats and reads and goes to church.

'Poor dears, and they have cancers?--Oh,' she says." 1

Next Captain Craig describes one who has "the child in absence." He is a man

"who feeds his very soul on poison.

No matter what he does or where he looks,
He finds unhappiness; or if he fails
To find it, he creates it, and then hugs it.
.....Give him a rose
And he will tell you it is very sweet
But only for a day.....
One of those men who never quite confess
That Washington was great." 2

Which of these two, asks Captain Craig, was right?

One was blinded by the lights; one walked in the shadows.

It is well, he answers, to live in the light, but not to be unmindful of the shadows. As for him, in spite of the barren years through which he has lived, he still trusts the light that he has earned

"and having earned, received," 3

and he bids his friends to climb high, knowing

"As well as you know dawn from lantern light
That far above you, for you, and within you,
There burns and shines and lives unwavering
And always yours, the truth. Take on yourself
But your sincerity, and you take on
Good promise for all climbing; fly for truth
And hell shall have no storm to crush your flight,
No laughter to vex down your loyalty." 4

To clothe his beliefs, he presents several character portraits. He tells of Count Pretzel von Wurzburger, the obscene, a "vagabond, a drunkard, and a sponge, but always a free creature with a soul":⁵ of a soldier who showed such an unexpected friendliness to a ragged, frightened, despairing

1. Collected Poems, page 127	4. Ibid., page 151
2. Ibid., page 129	5. Ibid., page 135
3. Ibid., page 134	

child that "life grew marvellously different," and what had once been "sad and lonely sounds" became now "the rarest music"¹ of a youth who "dreamed but could not sound the rhythm of God." The latter died too young to achieve, but even had he lived, that measure which "went singing through his life" would have ruined him,

"though in that ruin
There would have lived, as always it has lived
In ruin as in failure, the supreme
Fulfilment unexpressed." 2

In this early study, then, occurs Robinson's constantly reiterated theme of the success of apparent failure.

Of all these portraits, none is so affecting as that of the Carpenter of Nazareth, revealed in a dream. The Captain lies on his couch racked and tortured, fearing that with his own dull tools, which he had used "with wretched skill," he might hack out his life.

"But soon, and in the distance
Concealed, importunate, there was a sound
Of coming steps, --and I was not afraid;
No, I was not afraid then, I was glad;
For I could feel, with every thought, the Man,
The Mystery, the Child, a footfall nearer.
Then, when he stood before me, there was no
Surprise, there was no questioning: I knew him
As I had known him always, and he smiled.
'Why are you here?' he asked, and reaching down,
He took up my dull blades and rubbed his thumb
Across the edges of them, and then smiled
Once more.--'I was a carpenter,' I said,
'But there was nothing in the world to do.'--
'Nothing,' said he.--'No, nothing,' I replied.--
'But are you sure,' he asked, 'that you have skill?
And are you sure that you have learned your trade?
No, you are not.'--He looked at me and laughed
As he said that; but I did not laugh then,
Although I might have laughed.--'They are dull,' said
he.

1. Collected Poems, page 117
2. Ibid., page 143

'They were not very sharp if they were ground;
 But they are what you have, and they will earn
 What you have not. So take them as they are,
 Grind them and clean them, put new handles to them,
 And then go learn your trade in Nazareth.
 Only be sure that you find Nazareth.'--
 'But if I starve--what then?' said I. He smiled." 1

Here are epitomized many of the thoughts of the whole poem. The kindly laughter of the Carpenter betokens the divine humor which sees beyond apparent failure. The illumined smile spreads hope and courage. "The Child," who is also the "Man, the Mystery," companions mankind in love, and the Light is Nazareth.

The themes of light and courage occur also in other poems of the volume. In ISAAC AND ARCHIBALD are the lines:

"There's a light behind the stars
 And we old fellows who have dared to live,
 We see it." 2

THE KLONDIKE tells of the search of the twelve, unsuccessful but undaunted, "to find the golden river." SAINTE NITOUCHE relates the history of a man who took "the starry way, God's pathway through the gloom, and though when he died the world adjudged him a failure, "that was not the end of him."

"For what was his to live lives yet;
 Truth, quarter truth, death cannot reach." 3

No one knows whether he won the "unseen crown," but

"Saint Anthony nor Sainte Nitouche
 Had ever smiled as he did--quite." 4

In CAPTAIN CRAIG, therefore, are further elaborated the themes of light and courage. New notes are added in the ideas of earning the light which we receive, and of leaving behind

1. Collected Poems, page 141
2. Ibid., page 169
3. Ibid., page 216
4. Ibid., page 217

us after death such truth as we have discovered, even though it be but half, or even quarter truth.

In the next volume, THE TOWN DOWN THE RIVER, published in 1910, the Light is variously treated in THE TOWN DOWN THE RIVER,¹ CLAVERING,² BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD,³ and THE PILOT.⁴ In LINGARD AND THE STARS⁵ is the conviction of Lingard, at least, of survival after death.

"When earth is cold and there is no more sea,
There will be what was Lingard. Otherwise,
Why lure the race to ruin through the skies?
And why have Leffingwell, or Calverly?"⁵

This conviction is another variation of Robinson's idea of the Light.

In this volume also are three more historical portraits. THE MASTER is of Lincoln, and contrasts the pettiness of those who reviled him with his world-wide fame and grandeur.

"For he, to whom we had applied
Our shopman's test of age and worth,
Was elemental when he died,
As he was ancient at his birth."⁶

The second of the portraits is AN ISLAND. The island is St. Helena, and the frenzied words are Napoleon's. After all his dreams of world domination, he spends his last days, with tragic irony, on a little island lashed by his old enemy, the sea. In the present, there are only the island, rats, and pain to contemplate; of the past, the laurels he won for so short a time.

"So be the weary truth again retold

1. Collected Poems, page 319

4. Ibid., page 348

2. Ibid., page 333

5. Ibid., page 334

3. Ibid., page 342

6. Ibid., page 317

Of great kings overthrown
Because they would be kings, and lastly kings alone." 1

Napoleon had no light beyond that of self-glorification, while Lincoln's was a light too bright for his world to comprehend. In the third portrait, THE REVEALER, Robinson extols Theodore Roosevelt as also guided by a light far above the understanding of his complacent age. He calls him "the seer of our necessity," and believes that he has brought light to the shadows, ahs opened doors, and has exposed ills long concealed, but

"What You and I and Anderson
Are still to do is his reward;
If we go back when he is gone--
There is an Angel with a Sword." 2

These three poems shed light on Robinson's political views. The only hope for a people which lives in darkness and is content to serve Mammon is in its great men, whom it cannot even recognize.

The next volume of poems is THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY, published in 1916. It includes studies of inconsequential men like Flammonde³ and Old King Cole,⁴ who saw the Light and so were not failures; of Briony⁵ and Bokardo,⁶ who saw none and were therefore failures; and of the young man in SIEGE PERILOUS,⁷ who followed, against all opposition, a light by which he thought to shake the world. His achievement lagged far behind his dream, yet he did win a crown of a sort.

"There fell one day upon his eyes a light

1. Collected Poems, page 326

5. Ibid., page 48

2. Ibid., page 360

6. Ibid., page 58

3. Ibid., page 3

7. Ibid., page 41

4. Ibid., page 17

Ethereal, and he heard no more men speaking;
He saw their shaken heads, but no long sight
Was his but for the end that he went seeking.

"The end he sought was not the end; the crown
He won shall unto many still be given.
Moreover, there was reason here to frown:
No fury thundered, no flame fell from heaven." 1

CASSANDRA repeats the ideas of THE REVEALER.

"'Verily
What word have I for children here?
Your dollar is your only Word.
The wrath of it your only fear.

.....

"'Think you to tread forever down
The merciless old verities?
Are you never to have eyes
To see the world for what it is?

"'Are you to pay for what you have
With all you are?' No other word
We caught, but with a laughing crowd
Moved on. None heeded, and few heard." 2

Between THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT and THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY,³ the last poem in the volume, Lloyd Morris finds evidence of great growth. The former, he says, is "a declaration of personal faith," while the latter is "a poignantly imaginative vision of the whole of life."⁴ In this poem a man stands revealed for an instant on a high mountain against a flaming sky. Then he disappears into the unknown. This symbolizes man's passing from life. How has he reached the height, asks Robinson, and whither has he gone? The author then reviews the different faiths by which men have sought to explain life. What "drove or lured or guided him?"

It may have been a "vision answering a faith unshaken,"

1. Collected Poems, page 41
2. Ibid., pages 11, 12
3. Ibid., page 60

4. Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of
Edwin Arlington Robinson,
Page 71

by which he strove alone from one height to another, burned as in a fiery furnace. Or "by an easy trust assumed of easy trials," he may always have taken the comfortable path carved out by those who had toiled before him and have aspired to no other height "than one at which he neither quails nor tires." Or, "by a sick negation born of weak denials," he may have been utterly indifferent to anything outside of himself, have seen "truth in his own image, rather small," and found "life a lighted highway to the tomb." Or, "by a crazed abhorrence of an old condition," he may have "stumbled up from the past," seeing ahead nothing but chaos and a "last abysmal conflagration of his dreams." Or, "by a blind attendance on a brief ambition," he may have seen with his mechan-ic eyes

"a world without a meaning."
and labored only to "build himself an airy monument" that should "outlast an accidental universe."

At any rate, says Robinson, the way he took was ours, and each of us "at his own height" must await "another darkness or another light." If we believe not in Hell, Heaven, or Oblivion, have we no misgivings about "doing yet what we leave undone"? If we do believe in Oblivion, how can we excuse ourselves for launching those we love into a life of pain, of ashes, and of eternal night.?

Wherever this man against the sky was going, we know that his brief passing, his transience, have made some contribution

to the Word that shall lead the race onward. We know that no mere striving to satisfy physical desires, "no soft evangel of equality," no meaningless trapping of souls "wrought for nothing but the sake of being caught," will accomplish this purpose. Because Eternity records too vast an answer for us, shall we hear no more the Word? What do we see beyond the sunset "that lights again the way by which we came"? Why do we pay such a price "for each racked empty day

"That leads one more last human hope away"? Finally, if all our suffering comes to Nought, why do we live?

As always, Robinson leaves his question unanswered, but implies that there is in man something too great to be forever annihilated, and that after death he may still bring to pass his unfulfilled dreams. He implies too that in life each man climbs to his own height, and according to the height he attains, he makes some contribution to the Word by which future generations are to be guided.

Merlin is the first of the legendary characters of which Robinson makes use. The poem MERLIN is the tale of a man who once had the Light, but did not follow it. Yet he never entirely lost it, and when his world collapsed about him, he pressed on sadly toward the pale glimmer which remained. Published in 1917, MERLIN also reflects the unrest of the world in conflict. Merlin, symbolizing Philosophy, or man's intellect, "has seen as much as God would let him see."

Loving the world with all its imperfections, and loving Arthur with like frailties, he has made Arthur king of Camelot. Though he knows that Arthur's kingdom, founded upon two sins, "awaits a sure doom," he nevertheless thinks he has done well, for he supposes that the world will see itself mirrored in Arthur and at his ignoble fall will endeavor to redeem itself from a like fate. Thereupon Merlin departs to bury himself in Brittany at the lure of the lady Vivian. She symbolizes Love and eternal Woman in her youth and beauty, especially the new woman of the new age, restlessly awaiting she knows not what. Here, his work complete, he thinks to be "crowned with the glory of eternal peace."

At the very outset, however, that peace is threatened. The gate of Broceliande clangs behind him as no gate had

"ever clanged in Camelot
Nor in any other place if not in Hell." 1

There are ominous specks in the wine served only to kings and makers of kings. There arises

"Between him and the world a crumbling sky
Of black and crimson, with a crimson cloud
That held a far-off town of many towers
All swayed and shaken till at last they fell." 2

At Vivian's insistence he has removed his beard, symbol of his wisdom. "So," says Arthur, "he goes down smiling to the smaller life.....by love made little."

Nevertheless for ten years he finds a semblance of peace in Broceliande. Then comes Dagonet "like an awkward bird of doom" with the King's message. Without question Merlin re-

1. Collected Poems, page 262

2. Ibid., page 277

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turns sadly to Arthur, who sees at once on his face "a pathos of lost authority long faded and unconsciously gone."

Says Arthur to him:

"I shall see no Grail. For I have built
On sand and mud, and I shall see no Grail."

.....
'Nor I'" says Merlin. "'Once I dreamed of it,
But I was buried. I shall see no Grail.
.....I saw
Too much and that was never good for man.'" 1

In the face of the collapse of Camelot, Merlin is helpless.

"Arthur shall know now," he says,

"That I am less than Fate..... 2
For I can be no more what I was
And I can do no more than I have done.'" 3

Yet the King sees that meshed as Merlin is in his defection, even to indifference, he is

"All the while attended and exalted
By some unfathomable obscurity
Of divination, where the Grail unseen
Broke yet the darkness where a King saw nothing." 4

When he returns to Vivian, there is no more peace for him in Broceliande, for

"in his Paradise
Had come an unseen angel with a sword." 5

His thoughts give him no rest. Will his "avenging injured intellect," he wonders, like Arthur's fallen kingdom, be also a mirror, "Fate's plaything, in which new ages will see themselves and their declension"? At last, in a melancholy wave of revelation, he realizes that the cold angel's name is Change. He has seen too much for God's pleasure; that is, he has been too sure that he has seen all; he has forgotten that

1. Collected Poems, page 253-4
2. Ibid., page 259
3. Ibid., page 282

4. Ibid., page 258
5. Ibid., page 286

Time does not stand still, and in consequence has forsaken the Gleam and turned aside to dalliance.

"But let the man
Who saw too much, and was to drive himself
From paradise, play too lightly or too long
Among the moths and flowers, he finds at last
There is a dim way out;.....
And there.....
Shall he plod on, with death between him now
And the far light that guides him, till he falls.
..... I see the light,
But I shall fall before I come to it;
For I am old..... I saw too far,
But not so far as this. Fate played with me
As I have played with Time." 1

"This is the end," he tells Dagonet, after he has left Broceliande forever, "though in the end are many beginnings." It was the end of Arthur's insubstantial majesty when the Grail foreshadowed a quest of life that would lead many to death and some to "slow discouraging." It was

"a Light wherein men saw themselves,
In one another as they might become." 2

Many went to seek the Grail, and though none found it save Galahad (who dies and yet lives) they all saw "Something" which rendered the old ways forever unsatisfying. The kingdom, however, says Merlin, has not been wrecked in vain. Each man is a groping thought of the eternal will, who has no other way to find his inheritance than by the

"time-infuriating flame
Of a wrecked empire, lighted by the torch
Of woman, who, together with the light
That Galahad found is yet to light the world." 3

Vivian, reflects Merlin, is not cold and cruel, as she said, but warm and kind and overwise for woman in a world

1. Collected Poems, page 295-6-7
2. Ibid., page 306

3. Ibid., page 307

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and the first of the year and the first of the year

where men see not beyond themselves. Her heart is hungry for something which does not exist and shall never exist without her in a world that men are making. She says to him:

"'For you have wisdom, I have only sight
For distant things--and you.'"¹ 1

The full significance of MERLIN is understood only when we remember that it was written in the midst of the World War. Camelot's fall symbolizes the collapse of the pre-war civilization. Man's intellect in that era seemed all-powerful. As Arthur's kingdom founded on sin could not abide, no more could a civilization founded on wrongs and misconceptions. Yet men's intellect failed to prevent the catastrophe. Then men must turn to the ideal, the light within themselves--a light, moreover, which must be supplemented by woman's yet unfulfilled promise. The ideal for which men fought in the War was the vision of men as they might become. What they could not accomplish, future generations, building on their failure, may.

Underlying this, of course, is the story of Merlin, who had the Light and who, by not following it, brought ruin upon himself and his world.

LANCELOT, published in 1920, is also a product of the World War period. It portrays not only the physical conflict of armies, but the war in men's hearts. It questions the right of kings to be kings, and the worth of war. It reveals

Wound et tréed teh seafmane. I loved you and you were
distraxt seven. I had but twice for your golds yesterdays tot
mid od eyes and the sea was the first pen a ni red two

trials that ovsd I , nobetw even now tot "I
I " , not one--agaidt masteis tot

meds. No bootstraps si WJHM to consollingis first anT
new bffow est to rächm est ri nootris aew di est to mene
-livis new-egs est to engalies est seafolys firs a' tofes
. Intrewoq-fis bennor vte said at seafolys a' m. . noitsei
esow on , slide ton blaco nis no behmoy mogni a' m'gna. an
ancitceoncoim bus signs no behmoy m'lt'st'livis a' blaco
meds . endowes vte o' thewes o' behmoy seafolys a' new raf
--avlemeds in d'w rafg I est , fesbi est or h'w vte new
tot a'new v' behmoy que ad rafm m'nde , reveson , f'gai
est or rafg vte m'nde tot fesbi est . m'simor behmoy
v' est rafw . emone rafg v' est as h'w to m'leis v' est a' new
v' est no g'lf'ld , emofexing exuf' , allmores ton blaco

., v' , emofex

ow , m'lxm to v'c'e est si , v'c'e to , v'c'e m'lyProbd
n on v'c'e rafg v' , si g'liwolli ton v'c'e , v'c'e bus rafg est her
., v'c'e v'c'e bus blaco

est to rafmoy a' v'c'e si , v'c'e ni behmoy , TOJESWAL
telfmoy Isafayq est v'c'e ton v'c'e ton v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e
est emone rafg v'c'e . v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e
v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e v'c'e

the innate grandeur of human nature, walking stedfastly in the light for the time vouchsafed, resolutely turning from an outgrown ideal to another more potent, going down in defeat, yet rising again to press on through the darkness to the dim light ahead.

When Lancelot failed in his loyalty to Arthur, he believed his love and Guinevere's to be mightier than they. Then came the Light beckoning him away from her to "set out on the immortal Quest," to "go South to find the fires of God." After his return no one knew him for the man he was,

"Before" he "saw whatever it was" he "saw,
To make so little of kings and queen and
friends." 1

That light, he says, would have blinded him, but there comes another which he knows will not blind him, a Light mightier even than his love for Guinevere. Fear, he tells her, is driving him from her, not fear of Arthur and Modred, who desire his life, but fear of Modred, who desires the Queen and makes disaster imminent. But, says the Queen,

"There is a Light you fear more today
Than all the darkness that has ever been." 2

Knowing still no guide but love, yet scorning to be a "curse upon his conscience," a "weight to be dragged on always after him," Guinevere begs Lancelot for one last meeting before he departs. He is racked by regret for the past and remorse for what is to come.

"Time, tide, and twilight--and the dark,
And then for me the Light. But what for her?

1. Collected Poems, page 367
2. Ibid., page 379

".....Why are we here?
 What are we doing--kings, queens, Camelots,
 And Lancelot? And what is this dim world
 That I would have?.....
Who is this queen?
What are kings,
 And how much longer are they to be kings?
 When are the millions who are now like worms
 To know that kings are worms, if they are worms."¹

So Lancelot feeds

"The passion and the fear that now in him
 Were burning like two slow infernal fires
 That only flight and exile far away
 From Camelot should ever cool again."²

Despairingly he cries:

"God, what a rain of ashes falls on him
 Who sees the new and cannot leave the old."³

At last he yields to Guinevere, as gradually in his vision
 the face of Galahad, "for whom the Light was waiting," re-
 cedes, and he sees only the Queen's face, and knows it is not
 good

"That he should learn so late, and of this hour
 What men may leave behind them in the eyes
 Of women who have nothing more to give,
 And may not follow after."⁴

That night, in obedience to the law, Arthur orders
 Guinevere to be burned to death. Says Bedivere:

"The King that is the father of the law
 Is weaker than his child, except he slay it.
 Not long ago, Gawaine, I had a dream
 Of a sword over kings and of a world
 Without them."⁵

Remorse for his deed nearly maddens Arthur. When, however,
 he learns that the Queen has been saved, a joy steals over
 him because she still lives, though now gone from him irre-
 trievably; and

1. Collected Poems, page 383
 2. Ibid., page 384
 3. Ibid., page 385

4. Ibid., page 386
 5. Ibid., page 389

"The vision of a peace that humbled him
 And yet might save the world that he had won
 Came slowly into view.....
'Better be that
 Even that than blood,' he sighed, 'if that be peace.'"¹

Yet Modred, who symbolizes evil in his anger at his birth, ambition for the throne, and lust for the Queen, will not give him peace. Nor will Gawaine. Though the latter reproaches himself bitterly for having failed, even at the expense of his two brothers, to save Lancelot from this night of doom, yet for the life of those two brothers, who fell under Lancelot's axe, he demands Lancelot's blood.

So there is war with all its unprofitable slaughter; nor can there be peace so long as Arthur, Gawaine, and Lancelot are alive. Knowing that Lancelot might many times have dispatched his enemies, but is deterred by grief at the wrong he did Gawaine and by pity for the King, who once had loved him above all others, the Queen pleads:

"A woman.....
may see but one side only
 Where maybe there are two, to say no more.
And if the world
 Of Arthur's name be now a dying glory,
 Why bleed it for the sparing of a man
 Who hates you and a King who hates himself?"²

Lancelot cannot yield, but later agrees to the Bishop's proposal to end the war by sending the Queen back to Camelot. As he breaks the dread news to her he

"soon forgot the memory of all smiling
 While he gazed on the glimmering face and hair
 Of Guinevere--the glory of white and gold
 That had been his, and were, for taking of it,
 Still his to cloud with an insidious gleam
 Of earth, another that was not of earth,

1. Collected Poems, page 400
 2. Ibid., page 404-5

And so to make of him a thing of night--
 A moth between a window and a star,
 Not wholly lured by one or led by the other." 1

Can he never doubt a Vision, she asks, that lets him forget so lightly one for whom he once had cared so much, while she would have thrown down "crowns and glories" to share with him the last part of the world? Their love is of God, she holds, and God would not begrudge them one more morsel of life together. Their path would only end in havoc, he replies. A power not his own avails him strangely and he sees much

"in what has come to pass
 That is to be." 2

She begs him to drive the sword into her heart, or at least to go to France with her, but he says they would not stay long in the old garden.

"The fruit that we should find would be all fallen
 And have the taste of earth." 3

Yet is Guinevere sacrificed in vain, for the war still goes on in France. It is not until Gawaine falls at Lancelot's hands that his hate dissipates.

"I have no more venom in me now.

.....
 There was a madness feeding on us all,
 As we fed on the world.....
The world has paid enough
 For Camelot. It is the world's turn now,
 Or it would be if the world were not
 The world. Another Camelot, Bedivere says.
 Another Camelot and another King.
 He says when he's awake; but when he dreams
 There are no kings." 4

When the war in Britain between Arthur and Modred is over,
 "Each by the other slain," 5

1. Collected Poems, page 415
2. Ibid., page 421
3. Ibid., page 426

4. Collected Poems, pages 430-1
5. Ibid., page 436

—takia to yeld a kid to aism of on bai
 ,tata a bai wohnir a nswetd pao A
 f "medro edr yd bai to eno 'd baiwiy laki yd
 -tol mid aai sent ,aaisa aia ,motaIV a rduo rduo en gao
 wldir ,dum on h-tao bed uno of mowr tol eno yldgir on tog
 dduo aia of "entloq bus amoy" mwoh nwohrt even blnow aia
 ,abid aia ,hoo to si "voi xindT" blnow edr to tina tina edr mid
 -ot sili to festom from the mewt eghriged tan blnow bed aia
 A ,mildet ed ,ocved ni bai ,vino blnow tisq tisqT .tisq
 mowt aia ed bai ylswerte mid elieve mwo aia tan rwoq
 mowt of amoo and fadu n!"

S " ,ed of si tisq

of taoI to zo ,tried x d etd hnow edr svit of mid egd mbe
 ni gao yata son blnow ynt eyes ed tisq ,tisq mowt of og
 ,mowing hio edt

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S " ,mowt to stant edr even bai

lliye mow edt ,gi v ni beolliess crevenG ed toY
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 ,astqiesib sted aid taoI taoI a'tol

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lli on no phibet asenbri a est stedT
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 ,mow eti vlied ,toldemot redson A ,blnow edt
 ,gaf3 redson onn toldemot redson
 emserb ed mow taoI ;redson a'ed redson eyes ed
 ,tisq edt on kliq

revo at benthon bus tundt tundt mow taoI mow
 S " ,miala redson edt yd mow"

a cloud of memories overwhelms Lancelot, a cloud "for no
Light to pierce,"¹ and

"what was gone
Had now another lure than once it had."²

In the futility of the present, the dimness of the future, the old, symbolized by Guinevere, has now a new allurement. But how changed he finds her in Almesbury! For

"She was not the Queen of white and gold.

.....
The black hood and the white face under it
And the blue frightened eyes were all he saw."³

"'Is this the end of Camelot?'"⁴ he asks in dismay, and she replies:

"We are told of other States
Where there are palaces, if we should need them,
That are not made with hands. I thought you knew.
.....There is nothing now
That I can see between you and the Light
That I have dimmed so long!"⁵

He is good to come to her, she tells him, for she would have been lonely many a night not knowing if he cared.

"'And there is not much else for me to know
That earth may tell me. I found in the Tower
With Modred watching that all you said
That rainy night was true. There was time there
To find out everything. There were long days
And there were nights that I should not have said
God would have made a woman to endure.
I wonder if a woman lives who knows
All she may do.'"⁶

Having emerged from that fiery furnace, she now refuses his importunities and reminds him that even if they could go back to the old garden, the fruit would be all fallen. When he leaves her, she says, he must follow the Light, and though she has not what he has to make her see, she will some time

1. Collected Poems, page 431

2. Ibid., page 438

3. Ibid., page 440

4. Ibid., Ibid., page 440

5. Ibid., page 440-1

6. Ibid., page 442

on tol' lindis a , folcoml andawrevo entomem to holo a

Das an , soleig or tigil

shog aew jadw'

8 " had tI eoso medt and tations won hoh

and entent ent to aenent edt , thesing edt to yjililin edt al

and tneentli won x won and , tneentli d besilodwe , blo

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shog hmo tids le mew edt ton esw edt

di yamur hok oflit edt has been noldt edt

8 " xan ed tIe xew aew benedicti and edt hna

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benilger edt

nejadB raddo to blor xra sw"

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beno an tI giveml ton tigil a xam yDol medt evad

wonl of em tol wile done ton al stedt hna"

xewot edt ni hmo I em tIet xam dtsa , tsdt

blis nov tIe tadt galdotew berbom dlin

stedt edt em stedt , xirf em tigil xiser tsdt

eyah gno I xam stedt , galdotew tuo hult ot

blis evad ton blined I tsdt stedt et w -tadt ha

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sword em sevli genor g tI tsdyoy I

8 " ob xam edt tI

sevli ton edt , comit xelj tsdt mott begude galvH

og blino yadi tI ave tsdt mid abmih has sevli tigil edt

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agnot has , tigil edt welfoi jemad , xysa edt , red sevli edt

mit has tIet edt , xas red xam of edt tsdt ton xan edt

ODD xysa , blidI , blidI , 8 17A xysa , ame beveffed . 1

I-ODD xysa , blidI , 8 17B xysa , blidI , 8

SEB xysa , blidI , 8 17C xysa , blidI , 8

have a new light of her own." 1

As he rides away he can see nothing but

"her poor white face and hands, alone." 2

Over the land there is peace, but no peace in his heart. Once he thinks to turn back and make her free, but the Voice within him says:

"'You are not free.

You have come to the world's end, and it is best
You are not free. When the Light falls, death falls,
And in the darkness comes the Light.'" 3

So

"always in the darkness he rode on
Alone, and in the darkness came the Light. 4

In this poem man in his wisdom is racked by the conflict between love or woman and devotion to the Ideal, between the old order and the new. When the man-made world topples and falls, he turns to woman. Woman knows nothing greater than love, and though she has no choice but to yield to wisdom, after fiery trials she emerges with her love still dominant and stronger now than wisdom. The hope of the new world is the Light that comes to man out of darkness and the Light that is woman's own.

THE THREE TAVERNS was published in 1920. There is an echo of the War in the first poem, THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.⁵ It enumerates many who yield to their lower natures, but never find in the Valley of the Shadow any consummation of their desires. Only those who in despair go down into the Valley

1. Collected Poems, page 445

2. Ibid., page 447

3. Ibid., 448

4. ¹bid., page 449

5. Ibid., page 453

expecting only darkness find what they seek. Yet those who through no volition of their own, like those forced into the War, are plunged into the Valley may accomplish even there a noble work.

"For the children of the dark are more to name than are the wretched,
Or the broken, or the weary, or the baffled, or the shamed;
There are builders of new mansions in the Valley of the Shadow
And among them are the dying and the blinded and the maimed."

The other poems repeat the ideas already formulated in Robinson's earlier works. THE THREE TAVERNS,¹ about the apostle Paul, JOHN BROWN,² and REMBRANDT TO REMBRANDT³ are all of men who have followed the Light they saw, though in each case it has meant the loss of the favor of the world. All three are sure of the lasting value of their life's work.

Says John Brown:

"I shall have more to say when I am dead."

Says Rembrandt:

"Hold your light
So that you see.....
Assured that if you see right,
Others will have to see."

Says Paul:

"Death, like a friend unseen, shall say to me
My toil is over and my work begun."

In Paul's words also, which are the fruit of the experiences of a long life, are reflected a fearlessness and a trust in meeting whatever the future holds, as well as a serenity and a peace which must be the reward in age of a life-long following

1. Collected Poems, page 461

2. Ibid., page 485

3. Ibid., page 582

of the Light. He says he has seen

"too much of time and men
To fear the ravening or the wrath of either," 1

and

"out of wisdom has come love,
That measures and is of itself the measure
Of works and hope and faith.....
.....The last days
Are on the way that you prepare for them,
And was prepared for you, here in a world
Where you have sinned and suffered, striven and seen.
If you be not so hot for counting them
Before they come that you consume yourselves,
Peace may attend you all in these last days--
And me, as well as you. Yes, even in Rome.
.....
But none may say what he shall find in Rome." 2

ON THE WAY³ is an historical portrait of another of Democracy's great men, Washington.

"His genius is a flame that he must hold
So far above the common heads of men
That they may view him only through the mist
Of their defect, and wonder what he is."

DEMOS⁴ again holds a warning against trusting to the people, who view "through the mist of their defect" all such leaders who see the Light.

"Give as I will, I cannot give you sight
Whereby to see that with you there are some
To lead you, and be led. But they are dumb
Before the wrangling and the shrill delight
Of your deliverance that has not come,
And shall not, if I fail you--as I might.

.....
Rather be then your prayer that you shall have
Your kingdom undishonored. Having all,
See not the great among you for the small,
But hear their silence; for the few shall save
The many, or the many are to fall--
Still to be wrangling in a noisy grave."

In sharp contrast to the foregoing characters are two

1. Collected Poems, page 462

2. Ibid., page 470-1

3. Ibid., page 474

4. Ibid., page 471

overwhelming examples of men without light, Tasker Norris, in the poem of the same name,¹ and Avon, in AVON'S HARVEST.² The former had no aim, no friend, no genius, no madness, even, to make life worth the living; the latter was driven to madness and death by a hate which he had conceived in his boyhood.

ROMAN BARTHOLOW,³ published in 1923, is a long poem about a man who walked in darkness and then saw a light, which, after the disloyalty of his best friend and the ruin of his home, still gave him courage to go on to achieve.

"The man of books
 Answered him only with a lonely smile:
 And then, among the slowly falling leaves,
 He walked away and vanished gradually,
 Like one who had not been. Yet he had been
 For Bartholow the man who knew him best,
 And loved him best,--acknowledging always one
 That had betrayed and saved him. He was gone,
 Also, and there was no more to be said
 Of him; and there was no more to be paid,
 Apparently, on either side. The sum
 Of all that each had ever owed the other
 Was covered, sealed, and cancelled in a grave,
 Where lay a woman doomed never to live--
 That he who had adored her and outgrown her
 Might yet achieve." ⁴

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE,⁵ published in 1924, is the story of a man great in failure. In his youth Fernando Nash had believed that he was born to write a great symphony. He had listened, however, to the "drums of death." After twenty years of debauchery, he had heard once again the "drums of life," and had spent his last months triumphantly beating a drum on the sidewalk "for the glory of God." His "former dominance and authority," though now "disintegrated, lapsed,

1. Collected Poems, page 499

4. Ibid., page 865

2. Ibid., page 543

5. Ibid., page 921

3. Ibid., page 733

and shrunken," had yet "the presence in defeat," and

There was in the man
With all his frailties and extravagances,
The caste of an inviolable distinction.
.....And there was in him always,
Unqualified by guile and unsubdued,
By failure and remorse, or by redemption,
The grim nostalgic passion of the great
For glory all but theirs.....
.....And more than these,
There was the nameless and authentic seal
Of power and of ordained accomplishment." 1

DIONYSUS IN DOUBT, a volume of poems published in 1925, adds nothing to Robinson's reading of life. The title poem² and DEMOS AND DIONYSUS,³ which are dissertations, almost diatribes, on Democracy's attempt to standardize a nation by law, lack timelessness.

A MAN IN OUR TOWN⁴ is a further example of a humble man guided by the Light. He had a "homely genius for emergencies,

"And though he be forgotten, it was good
For more than one of you that he was here."

NOT ALWAYS I⁵ tells of one who faltered in his lonely struggle, for it seemed as if

"he could see the last light going out
Almost as if the fire of God had failed."

But finally new courage came, for

"out of silence came
A song somewhat as of the morning stars."

KARMA⁶ is an ironic picture of a man utterly devoid of light.

"Christmas was in the air and all was well
With him, but for a few confusing flaws
In divers of God's images. Because
A friend of his would neither buy nor sell,
Was he to answer for the axe that fell?

1. Collected Poems, page 957
2. Ibid., page 859
3. Ibid., page 904

4. Ibid., page 886
5. Ibid., page 887
6. Ibid., page 871

He pondered; and the reason for it was,
 Partly, a slowly freezing Santa Claus
 Upon the corner, with his beard and bell.

"Acknowledging an improvident surprise,
 He magnified a fancy that he wished
 The friend whom he had wrecked were here again.
 Not sure of that, he found a compromise;
 And from the fulness of his heart he fished
 A dime for Jesus who had died for men."

A CHRISTMAS SONNET,¹ "For One In Doubt," stresses again Robinson's belief in the survival of the ideal after life is done. In spite of the death of the Son of Man,

"Something is here that was not here before
 And strangely has not yet been crucified."

Therefore the ideal of "service and hope," and "love and brotherhood" need not be disavowed.

TRISTRAM,² published in 1927, contributes nothing to the sum total of Robinson's philosophy of life. On the other hand, CAVENDER'S HOUSE,³ appearing in 1929, concerns the coming of light to a murderer. His retribution is not so described. Rather, in the Biblical phrase, "He came to himself." For, after twelve years of wandering, he decides to allow God's law and man's to exact their last full measure, and for the first time since the committing of the dread deed, he experiences a modicum of peace.

THE GLORY OF THE NIGHTINGALES, published in 1930, contains the old theme of the Light with an interesting variation.

"'Some follow lights they have never seen,'" 4

1. Collected Poems, page 903

2. Ibid., page 595

3. Ibid., page 961

4. The Glory of the Nightingales, page 45

says Nightingale,

"'And I was given a light that I could see
But could not follow. There's the devil in that
Always.'" 1

In his "'unfledged, omniscient years of youth,'" 2

"'there were premonitions, then, and warnings.
I saw myself a part of a small world
Of traps and lies and fights and compromises.
.....I have not always loved
Myself. I had enough of other vision
To see the other side of selfishness,
But I had not the will to sacrifice
My vanity for my wits.'" 3

He became the great man of Sharon. He obtained all he asked of life until he fell in love with Agatha. She was won, however, by his best friend, Malory, a man of science. Years later Nightingale says to Malory:

"'you took everything there was
Alive for me to live for. You had science,
And I had nothing without Agatha.'" 4

A venom of which he had never before been aware took possession of him. When opportunity came, in his attempt to destroy Malory, he caused the death of Agatha. It is then that Malory turns his whole attention to science. Having achieved a measure of success, he returns to the town of his boyhood with the intent to kill first Nightingale and then himself. Finding, however, that nature has done the deed for him in making Nightingale a helpless invalid, he experiences a new and strange desire to live, with glimmerings which he thinks may be intimations of a coming light. To his great surprise Nightingale makes over to him his great house by the sea and a fortune, that he may apply his scientific knowledge to the

1. The Glory of the Nightingales, page 45
2. Ibid., page 50
3. Ibid., page 50
4. Ibid., page 60

SP 8887, analogously to the right of
SP 8887, which is
SP 8887, which is
SP 8887, which is
SP 8887, which is

saving of countless human lives.

Thus good came out of evil, because Nightingale belatedly followed his light. He says, before he kills himself:

"The ruin I made
Is not all ruin, unless you make it so.
But if you ask why Agatha was chosen
To be the innocent means and sacrifice,
You will ask more than me before you know!" 1

A new purpose gives direction to Malory's life.

"There was nothing left for Malory but remembrance
Of the best that was behind him, and life struggling
In the darkness of a longer way before him
Than a way there was from anywhere to Sharon--
A darkness where his eyes were to be guided
By light that would be his, and Nightingale's." 2

To Malory, as to Lancelot, light is to come out of darkness.

Matthias in MATTHIAS AT THE DOOR, published in 1931, is much the sort of man that Nightingale might have become if "none had thwarted" him. None had thwarted Matthias. He had great possessions; he had won Natalie, who had married him without love; and at fifty he could complacently contemplate Garth as a human failure and not wonder at his self-inflicted death. When he suddenly learns that Natalie loves and has always loved Timberlake, and that Timberlake out of gratitude to Matthias for saving his life had made himself of no account in Natalie's eyes, his world crashes. After three years, when Matthias has become more beast than man, Natalie follows Garth through the door of death.

"Matthias, when he saw that Natalie
Was dead, saw nothing else." 3

1. The Glory of the Nightingales, page 76
2. Ibid., page 83
3. Ibid., page 64

Later was born in him a new pride of bitterness.

"And for Matthias pride was more than life.
He was proud
 That he could meet with patience and high scorn
 A life without a scheme and to no purpose--
 An accident of nameless energies,
 Of which he was a part, and no small part.
 His blindness to his insignificance
 Was like another faith, and would not die." 1

Then, to Matthias's great joy, Timberlake returns, broken in health. As he lies dying, he passes on to Matthias much that he has learned in his life--a life which was not worth much, yet worth more than Matthias could see.

"Do not ask me why so many of us
 Are more like sketches of ourselves, half done
 By nature and forgotten in her workshop
 Than like a fair or tolerable fulfilment
 Of her implied intention.....
 I have found gold, Matthias, where you found gravel,
 And I can't give it to you. I feel and see it,
 But you must somehow find it for yourself.
There's a nativity
 That waits for some of us who are not born.
 Before you build a tower that will remain
 Where it is built and will not crumble down
 To another poor ruin of self, you must be born.
 You are not old, Matthias; you are so young
 That you see nothing in fate that takes away
 Your playthings but a curse, and a world blasted,
 And stars you cannot reach that have no longer
 A proper right to shine." 2

After Timberlake's passing, Matthias also goes down to the door of death. Garth's voice, however, deters him from entering. He, like Garth, has failed, and

"having more
 To fail with, failed more thoroughly and abjectly,
 But that was not the end." 3

Nothing is wasted, though much is misused. As Matthias returns to life, he knows

1. Matthias at the Door, page 65
- 2: Ibid., page 78
- 3: Ibid., page 97

"He must go back again, he must be born,
 And then must live, and he who had been always
 So promptly served, and was to be a servant,
 Must now be of some use in a new world
 That Timberlake and Garth and Natalie
 Had strangely lived and died to find for him.
 The night was cold,
 And in the darkness was a feel of death,
 But in Matthias was a warmth of life,
 Of birth, defending and sustaining him
 With patience, and with an expectancy
 That he had said would never in life again
 Be his to know. There were long hours to wait,
 And dark hours; and he met their length and darkness
 With a vast gratitude that humbled him
 And warmed him while he waited for the dawn." 1

In this poem, as in so many others, light comes only after the destruction of a world. Natalie and Garth had no light to live by; Timberlake had a light which men could not see. Out of their lives, comes light to Matthias. He must be born again; he must build, upon the ruins of the old, a better and invincible self.

NICODEMUS, published in 1932, contains several notable long poems reiterating and emphasizing ideas so frequently expressed in earlier volumes. Since TALIFER, appearing in 1933, is a story pure and simple, NICODEMUS may be considered Robinson's latest published words in his "reading of life and character."

The title poem arrays before us Caiaphas, the high priest, smug, complacent, always right--with no light; Nicodemus, perplexed and harassed, seeing a light he has not courage to follow; and the lowly Carpenter, living in the Light and showing men the way from death to life. He holds His body as

about 10 feet above the ground, and the top of the tree is about 15 feet above the ground.

but

"'an instrument whereon the spirit
Plays for a time--and not for long.'" 1

Men may destroy it,

"'but it will not be dead
.....because it is alive.'" 2

Therefore He can sit

"Alone in a dark room and not afraid." 3

NICODEMUS stresses the courage which comes from living in the Light--for out of the Light is born the conviction that the spirit outlasts the body and lives forever.

In TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE, the apostle of liberty to the black man knows, too, that his body will not die at Napoleon's hands. He realizes that he is

"A man betrayed, who sees his end a ruin,
Yet cannot see that he has lived in vain." 4

For, he says,

"Napoleon cannot starve my name to death
Or blot it out with his. There is an island
Where men remember me, and from an island
Surprising freight of dreams and deeds may come
To make men think." 5

Here again is expressed confidence that man's work is not in vain.

Ponce de Leon, in the poem of the same name, has spent his life in an ignoble search for the fountain of youth. He has found neither the fountain nor any peace to attend him in his last hours. He finds comfort, however, in the presence of the

1. Nicodemus, page 5
2. Ibid., page 8
3. Ibid., page 13

4. ¹bid, page 28
5. Ibid., page 30

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wise old doctor, and tells him he is glad he never found the fountain,

"'For there is peace and wisdom in your eyes,
And no fear for the end--which is worth more
To me now than all fountains. Tell me something.
Tell me--what does it mean?'" 1

The sage in answer tells of hidden voices which reside in some of humankind, and says:

"'I shall soon follow you,
For I am old, too old to be afraid,
Or to care tragically where or when--
So long as there are voices.'" 2

De Leon replies:

"'I am glad your eyes are watching me,
They say more than you have told me--
.....I see more in them
Than I can see in all the sixty years
That I have lived. I don't say what it is.
I don't know what it is and shall not ask--
So long as it is there. It may be voices.'" 3

The old doctor recalls the apostle Paul in the serenity and trust with which he awaits the end of his life. Such trust is the fruit of listening always to the inner voices. The same idea is differently expressed in HECTOR KANE. Hector Kane is a man of eighty-five.

"To look at him was to believe
That as we ask we may receive;
Annoyed by no such evil whim
As death, or time, or truth." 4

The old man says:

"'We die of what we eat and drink
But more we die of what we think.
For which you see me still as young
At heart as heretofore.'" 5

In contrast to this is YOUNG GIDEON, which depicts the

1. Nocodemus, page 47
2. Ibid., page 48
3. Ibid., page 49

4. Ibid., page 68
5. Ibid., page 70

and longer reverent or daily or at the end of the project like asking

for a blessing.

As a result of the process of evaluation,
each group of students has their own
recommendations and list of activities which will be
of interest to the other groups.

After this, the students go on to make

and collect their findings.

Finally, the groups present their findings to the class and
the teacher. The teacher then asks the students to evaluate the

presentations and to make suggestions.

After this, the teacher asks the students to evaluate their own work
and to make suggestions for improvement.

Finally, the teacher asks the students to evaluate the work of the other groups
and to make suggestions for improvement.

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fear and the feeling of impotency which besets modern youth. When the Voice for which Gideon has been waiting comes, he is afraid. He afterwards thinks he has gained courage, and "freedom rings through him like a bell." Yet, when the next morning he arises to look for the sign which God has promised, he finds himself even now

"Fearing to find the dew upon the fleece." 1

THE MARCH OF THE CAMERON MEN closes the volume with the tale of a man and woman who are ready, after a deed of guilt, to take the road of freedom--which is also the road of darkness--until the woman, yielding to her better nature, leads the way to the only freedom which remains. For, she says:

"I think that when a woman and a man
Are on their way to make of their two lives
Deliberate and ceremonial havoc,
There's folly in going on if one of them
Sees what's ahead, knowing the other sees it
And shuts his eyes. I have paid once for ruin
And once will do. I thought, before I thought,
Before I knew, that I could see fair weather
For you and me, and only friendliness
In every natural sign that led me on--
Till I found nature waiting like a fox
For an unguarded pheasant.....
Is it not better to be wise tonight
And free tomorrow? To be wise and free
Has always been a dream for most of us,
And will remain a dream. Yet for a few--
For you and me--it will be real and easy
If we be ourselves." 2

The foregoing study establishes the fact of Robinson's belief in an inner power which renders man indomitable. This power, in a few instances described as Voices, is almost always

1. Nicodemus, page 65

2. Ibid., page 86-7

alluded to as the Light. It is variously identified with faith in Self, faith in God, Wisdom, Knowledge, Thought, and Truth. It is the vision of the Ideal, or more simply stated, one's better nature. Some might call it the divine spark, but Robinson's emphasis seems not so much on a divinity towards which mankind aspires as on a humanity perfected from within. When, for instance, Arthur's knights set out on their quest for the Grail, "men saw themselves in each other as they might become."

With this Light is born a conviction that truth is eternal; that man's spirit does not die with his body, but lives on to a richer fulfillment, leaving, however, on earth the modicum of truth it has there earned. Such a conviction Robinson implies, rather than expresses. He never definitely answers his oft-recurring question: Are we created for nothing in an accidental, purposeless world? His only answer is another question: If so, why, after life's unnumbered tragedies, do we still aspire; why do we still follow the Light? For confidence in the Light never fails to beget courage to endure, to fall, and again to press on out of darkness.

Of the characters which Robinson examines some are dominated by the Light and are therefore in the true sense successful. Examples of such are:

Zola	Paul
Verlaine	John Brown
George Crabbe	Rembrandt
Thomas Hood	Washington
Vanderberg	A Man in our Town
Isaac and Archibald	Timberlake
Lincoln	The sage of Havana
Theodore Roosevelt	Toussaint L'Ouverture

Flammonde
Old King Cole
Lancelot

Galahad
Captain Craig
The Master

Others, having no Light, are failures, like

John Everdown
Luke Havergal
Bokardo
Tasker Norris
Avon

Gabrielle
Natalie
Garth
Karma
Napoleon

Still others have lights which they do not follow. Such are:

Merlin
Fernando Nash
Nightingale

Examples of men who at first had no Light, but later found it out of darkness are:

Bartholow
Matthias
Cavender

Although Robinson has said that he does not consider life a prison-house, he represents it as such for those without the Light. It is rather those who have the Light in varying degrees who resemble the bewildered infants in the spiritual kindergarten, trying to spell God with the wrong blocks. Though there is no real pessimism in this view, there is undeniably a bleakness. Verily the night is filled with sorrow and weeping, but it is courage which comes in the morning, rather than joy. Captain Craig alone seems to have found what he describes as that "Wiser kind of joy," which comes from "learning to laugh with God."

The only characters who approach Captain Craig's atti-

tude are three other old men, Hector Kane, the sage of Havana, and the apostle Paul; but they have won, after a life-long quest of the Light, not joy, but peace, fearlessness, and trust. Even with Paul this is less a trust in God than a faith in human destiny, for Robinson's God is God the Creator, rather than God a Ruler and Guide.

Strangely enough, or so it seems to me, Robinson never identifies his Light with the Christian's Light of the world, though he has made his two portraits of the Christ to me the most compelling of the whole range of his work. Only in CAPTAIN CRAIG does he counsel going to Nazareth to find the solution of the world's perplexities. In other poems his only answer to his questions, "Why are we here? Is life worth living?" is the peace and trust of those full of years who have long seen and followed the Light. May we not assume that they have found at least a few of the right blocks?

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VERMIFORMES

CHILOPODA

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